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Nathaniel Rochester

1752

Thomas Rochester Shepard

1852

By

CHARLES SHEPARD

"Si monumentum requiris, circumspeice."

Rochester 14, New York
Published by Charles Shepard
45 Exchange Street
1952

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Limited Edition

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FIRCROFT PRESS---151-R

Rec'd Dec 24-1979

Nathaniel Rochester

Along the eastern margin of the state of Virginia, the rivers run roughly parallel to each other, southeastward to the sea, and divide the land into long finger-like necks. The peninsula between the Potomac River to the north and the Rappahannock River to the south is called the Northern Neck. And here in the Northern Neck, southeast from the city of Fredericksburg and northeast from the the city of Richmond, far removed from any railroad line but readily accessible to the water transportation of colonial days, lies Westmoreland County.

It is a region which has given distinguished men to the nation. In the northern part of Westmoreland County, the great George Washington was born in 1732. Not far away, in the same general part of the county, is the birth place of James Monroe, fifth president of the United States. This was the home county of the illustrious Lee family, and of the distinguished Carters of Virginia. It is doubtful whether any other county in America can claim a more brilliant galaxy of native sons.

Near the southern end of Westmoreland County, in Cople Parish, lived John Rochester and his wife Hester or Esther. And here, in 1752, was born their third son and fifth child. They named him Nathaniel. It was a name which had not previously occurred in the Rochester family, but it had been borne by several members of his mother's family, the Thrifts. One Nathaniel Thrift was probably Esther's grandfather. So we may surmise with reasonable assurance that Nathaniel Rochester was named for one of the Nathaniel Thrifts in his mother's family, and probably for her grandfather. The theory of the Thrift source of the name Nathaniel introduced into the Rochester family, receives confirmation from the fact that in later years Nathaniel Rochester gave one of his sons the name Nathaniel Thrift Rochester.

This was the year of the great calendar reform in England and her colonies. Previously, the year had legally and officially begun

on March 25, although Scotland and most of the Continental European countries had long before adopted January 1 as New Year's day, and the practice of beginning the year on the first of January was spreading privately but without legal sanction, through the American colonies. By an Act of Parliament passed in 1750, England and her colonies at last fell in step with the majority of European nations, and established January 1 as the beginning of the new year. To adjust the accumulated discrepancy between the old Julian calendar and the new and more accurate Gregorian calendar, eleven days were dropped from the calendar in September of 1752, when Nathaniel was just a few months old. The day after September 2 was counted as September 14, a cataclysmic event accompanied by riots in London, where mobs, feeling they had been cheated of eleven days of life, roamed the streets shouting "Give us back our eleven days!"

And so the people of that day, if born before September 14, 1752, added eleven days to their birth dates, to transform the "old style" date to the corresponding "new style" date, if they wished to celebrate the anniversary at the correct time. Thus, just twenty years earlier, the family Bible of the Washington family had recorded the birth of George as being on February 11, 1732. When he was twenty years old, the calendar adjustment from "old style" to "new style" shifted the birthday of George Washington from February 11 to February 22, as now celebrated.

In the case of Nathaniel Rochester, we have no contemporary record of the date of his birth. No family Bible kept by his parents has come down to us. The parish register of Cople Parish might have given the information, but it was destroyed or lost many years ago. All we have is Nathaniel Rochester's own statement, written years later in his own Bible and in his autobiography, that he was born on February 21, 1752. We can not be certain, but we may reasonably assume that in stating his birth date, he had already made the necessary and customary adjustment to "new style," and that if his birth had been recorded on the day it occurred, it would have been put down as February 10.

In 1754, when Nathaniel was about two years old, his father

died. Two or three years later, his mother married Thomas Critcher, who took the whole family with him to Granville County, North Carolina, in 1763.

It would be pleasant to think that in the years before this branch of the Rochester family left Westmoreland County, they had been friends of the Washingtons, the Lees, and other prominent families of the county. It may have been so, but there is no contemporary evidence to prove it, and to the present author it seems rather improbable. The home of the Rochesters was roughly 25 miles southeast of the home of the Washington family, and about 12 miles from Stratford, the home of the Lees. The Rochesters, in those generations before Nathaniel, were simple people in modest circumstances. Their home plantation, purchased originally by Nathaniel's great-grandfather Nicholas Rochester, was 100 acres, and the family land holdings had later been increased. They were, of course, "planters" in the sense that they were land-holding and slave-owning people, but they were comparatively small and inconspicuous planters having nothing like the wealth or the prominence of some of the more distinguished families of Westmoreland County.

Because of his step-father's removal to North Carolina, it was in the latter colony, rather than in Virginia, that Nathaniel Rochester grew to manhood, and it was there that he started his business career and performed his Revolutionary War service. His eldest brother William had died in childhood, so that it was his next brother John who became the heir to their father's lands in Westmoreland County. John returned from North Carolina to Virginia in 1766, settled upon the ancestral lands, married, and raised his family there. It was this John Rochester who served in the Revolutionary War from Virginia, and whose children later moved to Kentucky, establishing the branch of the family which has been well chronicled in the book *House of Rochester in Kentucky*, by Mrs. Agatha Rochester Strange, published at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, in 1889. Nathaniel may have visited his brother at the ancestral home in Westmoreland County, but he never returned to Virginia to live.

Family wealth in those days was mainly in land. And because Nathaniel's father had died without leaving a will, all of the land (except for the widow's dower portion) went to the elder surviving son. Thus Nathaniel had no inherited wealth, no resources of capital behind him. We do not know what schooling his mother and step-father may have been able to give him. But we do know that when he was sixteen years of age, in 1768, he obtained employment by a merchant at Hillsborough, in Orange County, North Carolina, about forty miles from his home in Granville County. From that time forward, Nathaniel made his own way in the world. He made it honorably, and with distinction.

The main facts of his life have been published elsewhere, and it is not intended to repeat them here in detail. Of his Revolutionary War service, it may be said in brief that he was a member of the Committee of Safety for Orange County in 1775, and a member of the first Provincial Convention of North Carolina, in the same year. At this convention he was appointed a Major of Militia, and Paymaster to the Minute Men. In May, 1776, he was appointed a Colonel of the North Carolina Line, and Commissary-General of Military Stores. In 1777, he was superintendent of an arms factory at Hillsborough, North Carolina.

At Hillsborough, Nathaniel Rochester had been engaged in the manufacturing business with Colonel Thomas Hart. Because of depredations by Tories in the neighborhood, endangering the life and property of Colonel Hart, he removed in 1780 from North Carolina to Hagerstown, Maryland, and Nathaniel Rochester went with him. There at Hagerstown, the two were again in business together, manufacturing flour, rope, and nails.

It was here at Hagerstown that romance finally caught up with Nathaniel Rochester. At the age of 36, rather late in life for those days, he was married on April 20, 1788, to Sophia Beatty, second daughter and sixth child of the sixteen children of Colonel William Beatty of Frederick, Maryland, and his wife, Mary Dorothy Grosh. This William Beatty was a prominent man in the vicinity of Frederick, and was a grandson of John Beatty and his wife Susanna Asfordby of Ulster County, New York. Susanna Asfordby (often

although incorrectly spelled Affordby, probably due to mistaking the old long "s" for an "f") was the daughter of William Asfordby who, when he came from England to the province of New York, brought with him a parchment pedigree of twelve generations which had been prepared in 1562 for William's great-grandfather Edward Asfordby by one of the Heralds of the College of Arms in England. It is through this Susanna Asfordby that the descendants of Nathaniel Rochester may trace their ancestry back to innumerable English families of country gentry, to many barons and other members of the peerage, through one line to King Henry III (descending through his son Edmund, Earl of Lancaster) and through another line to King Edward I (descending through his son Thomas de Brotherton, Earl of Norfolk). The details and the proofs are given in the book *The Ancestry of Leander Howard Crall*, by Frank Allaben, published by the Grafton Press, New York City, in 1908, and many of the details of this lineage are also given, in abbreviated form, in the book *Beatty-Asfordby; the ancestry of John Beatty and Susanna Asfordby, with some of their descendants*, by Mrs. Samuel Rudolph Turk, published in 1909.

After his marriage in 1788, Nathaniel Rochester continued for some years to reside in Hagerstown, and most of his children were born there. In 1800 and again in 1803, in company with Major Charles Carroll of Bellevue, Maryland (a cousin of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, signer of the Declaration of Independence) and Colonel William Fitzhugh of Hagerstown, Maryland, Nathaniel Rochester visited the Genesee region of western New York, and during the latter visit the three men together purchased the so-called hundred acre tract on the west bank of the Genesee River at the falls, in the center of what is now the city of Rochester. The travelers returned to Maryland. It was not until seven years later, in the spring of 1810, that Nathaniel Rochester closed out his business in Hagerstown and moved his family northward to the Genesee Country, making his home first in the village of Dansville, then moving in 1815 to Bloomfield. From these places, he made frequent trips to the falls, surveying the tract, laying it out into lots, and selling them at a low price to attract settlers. Buildings

began to rise, where before had been only wilderness and the roaring of the cataract.

The new settlement, at first called Falls Town or simply The Falls, was soon given the name of Rochester, after the senior one of the three partners who had purchased the tract and offered the lots for sale. In 1817, the Legislature incorporated the village and changed its name to Rochesterville; in 1822 another Act of the Legislature changed the name back to Rochester. It was not until 1834, after the founder's death, that Rochester was incorporated as a city and Nathaniel's son-in-law Jonathan Child became the first mayor.

Meanwhile, in April, 1818, Nathaniel Rochester and his family left Bloomfield and moved into the village which he had founded. Here he resided the rest of his life. He died in his home in Rochester on May 17, 1831, aged 79 years. He was buried in the old village graveyard, but his grave, and those of other members of the family, were later moved to Mount Hope Cemetery, where his simple monument may now be seen.

He left many descendants. Of his 12 children, 10 grew to maturity, and 8 of them had children. There were about 63 grandchildren. By an incomplete count, there were at least 116 great-grandchildren, and 70 great-great-grandchildren, scattered far and wide, from New England to California. None of the descendants bearing the surname Rochester is now living in the city of Rochester, but there are some in the nearby city of Buffalo, and descendants in female lines still live in the city of Rochester. To other descendants in Rochester and elsewhere, it is somewhat amusing to see how the editors of the local Rochester newspapers always single out a certain two or three of the local descendants for special publicity whenever there is any occasion for mentioning the family of Nathaniel Rochester, completely ignoring the many others who have an equal claim to the blood, and giving their readers the impression that others do not exist.

For those who wish further details of the life of Nathaniel Rochester or information about his descendants, there are three main source books which may be consulted. The first of these is *Early*

History of the Rochester Family in America, by the Colonel's grandson and namesake, Nathaniel Rochester of Buffalo, published in 1882. Next is *The Rochester Historical Society, Publication Fund Series, volume III*, published in 1924. Pages 255-385 of this publication contain a wealth of material, including a copy of Nathaniel Rochester's autobiography, the text of the sermon preached at his funeral, and a family history which is, in effect, a second and revised edition of the *Early History of the Rochester Family in America* of 1882. A new edition of the book under the title *The Rochester Family in America, 1640-1934*, by Edward Fortescue Rochester, was privately printed in 1934, and contains additional information not found in either of the earlier books, including a version of the autobiography which differs in a few minor respects from the version printed in volume III of the Rochester Historical Society publications.

In addition to these three major sources, there are numerous references to Nathaniel Rochester and his family throughout other volumes of the Publications of the Rochester Historical Society. There is also the interesting little book *Backward Glances at Old Rochester*, by Katharine Rochester Montgomery Osgood, published at Buffalo in 1937. A good biographical sketch of Nathaniel Rochester, with details of his last illness and death, and other information not contained in the main source books above mentioned, appears on pages 408-415 of *Sketches of Rochester; with incidental notices of Western New-York*, by Henry O'Reilly, published in Rochester in 1838.

The city of Rochester, third largest in size in the state of New York, is the largest city in the state to bear the name of one of its founders. Grouping the cities of the nation in order of population according to the 1950 census, Rochester appears to be second in size, throughout the entire United States, of those cities which bear the surnames of their founders. It is exceeded only by Cleveland; and if one is a stickler for precise orthography, it may even be contended that the city of Cleveland does not bear the surname of its founder, Moses Cleaveland, but rather a contracted or abbreviated mutilation of his surname. And if Cleveland could be elim-

inated on this technical ground, then Rochester would seem to be the largest city in the nation which bears the surname of an actual founder of the city. True, there are several larger cities which are named from the surnames of individuals (e. g., Houston, Dallas, and Denver) but those individuals for whom these other cities were named were apparently not actual founders, so far as the present author has been able to learn. Where the man for whom the city was named was really there on the spot, owned the land or a share of it, and started the city at least in part by his own exertions, Cleveland and Rochester seem to head the list.

And Rochester need not be ashamed of her name or her founder. Nathaniel Rochester himself was a modest and unpretentious man, who would be the last to magnify his accomplishments. But where else among the founders of cities — indeed, where else among any men throughout the nation—can another be found to equal the record of Nathaniel Rochester: A successful business man engaged in mercantile and manufacturing pursuits in four states (North Carolina, Maryland, Kentucky, and New York): a member of the Legislatures of three states (North Carolina, 1777; Maryland, 1790; New York, 1822); a county clerk in two states (Clerk of the County Court of Orange County, North Carolina, 1778; the first County Clerk of newly organized Monroe County, New York, 1821); a church official in two states (clerk of the vestry of the Episcopal Church at Hillsborough, North Carolina; a founder and first senior warden of St. Luke's Episcopal Church at Rochester); a postmaster (Hagerstown, 1791-1797, 1798-1804); a county judge (Washington County, Maryland, 1797); a sheriff (Washington County, Maryland, 1804-1807); a slave owner who brought his slaves north in order to give them their freedom; a member from two states of the Electoral College for election of the President of the United States (Maryland, 1808, for election of President Madison; New York, 1816, for election of President Monroe); a bank president in two states (first President of the Hagerstown Bank, 1807-1810; first President of the Bank of Rochester, 1824; also a director of the Canandaigua Branch of the Utica Bank, 1817-1823); a chief moving spirit in the erection of a new

county (largely instrumental in securing passage by the Legislature of the law to establish Monroe County, 1821); the founder of an industry new to the region (builder of the first paper mill in western New York, at Dansville, 1810); and a man who, when nearly sixty years of age, removed from comfortable and settled surroundings to a new home in a comparative wilderness, to be the chief planner and inspiring leader in a new community.

The city of Rochester might well be proud of its name and of its founder, had he performed but half of these accomplishments. It seems strange indeed that as this year 1952 draws to its close, the city which owes its origin to Nathaniel Rochester has taken no notice (or at least none sufficiently conspicuous to come to the attention of the present author) of the fact that this year is the two hundredth anniversary of his birth.



Thomas Rochester Shepard

About fifty miles south of the city of Rochester, up the Genesee Valley and on a branch of the Genesee River known as Canaseraga Creek, lies the village of Dansville, formerly in Steuben County but now in Livingston County, New York. It is a beautiful village, situated on the valley bottom with high hills rising majestically along either side. It was in this village that Nathaniel Rochester made his first home in western New York when he moved northward from Maryland in 1810. And to this village, about 1814, came Joshua Shepard, originally from Plainfield, Connecticut. Soon he purchased considerable land in the village. The seller was Nathaniel Rochester. Thus was accomplished the first connection between the Rochester family and the Shepard family, albeit only a commercial transaction of barter and sale.

Some thirty years later occurred another and more important connection between the two families. On October 7, 1846, in St. Luke's Episcopal Church in the city of Rochester, Charles Shepard of Dansville, eldest child and only son of Joshua Shepard, was married to Miss Katherine Rochester Colman, granddaughter of Nathaniel Rochester, the founder of the city.

Just a century (to the year, but not to the day) after Nathaniel Rochester himself was born, his granddaughter, Kitty Colman Shepard gave birth to her third child, born at Dansville on July 31, 1852. They called him Thomas Rochester Shepard.

The boy was named for his mother's uncle, Thomas Hart Rochester, who was the third son of Nathaniel Rochester. Thus it was Tom Shepard's great uncle for whom he was named, and he told the present author that he remembered his Uncle Tom (who died when Tom Shepard was 22 years old) and that when he was a youngster, Uncle Tom had taken him fishing at Irondequoit Bay, near Rochester.

It was natural that Kitty Colman Shepard should have named

her son for one of her uncles, for she felt particularly close to her uncles and aunts. Kitty's mother, Catherine Kimball Rochester Colman, had died when Kitty was only eleven years old, and her father, Dr. Anson Colman, one of the earliest physicians in the city of Rochester, had died two years later. From that time onward, the young orphan and her brother and sisters had been raised by her uncles and aunts, she living mainly with her uncle Henry E. Rochester, while her sisters and brother lived with various others of the family. Thus it was natural that the Colman children were thrown into closer contact with, and became more attached to, their uncles and aunts, than would have been the case if they had not been orphaned.

But when one is interested in tracing the source of a given name coming into a family, one will naturally ask: If Thomas Rochester Shepard was named for Thomas Hart Rochester, where did Thomas Hart Rochester get his name? The name Thomas had not previously occurred in this branch of the Rochester family. The answer seems clear. The autobiography of Nathaniel Rochester shows that he was engaged in business with Colonel Thomas Hart, of Hillsborough, North Carolina, from 1778 onwards for many years. It was on account of Colonel Thomas Hart's removal from Hillsborough to Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1780, that Nathaniel Rochester himself moved to Hagerstown; and at the latter place they were again in business together until they dissolved partnership in 1792, after which Colonel Hart removed to Kentucky in 1794 and settled at Lexington. They must have been warm friends as a result of all those years of association, and Nathaniel must have continued to hold his former partner in high esteem after Colonel Hart removed to Lexington, for it was in 1797 that Nathaniel Rochester gave to his son the name of Thomas Hart Rochester, thus laying the foundation for the name which was passed onward in 1852 to Nathaniel's great-grandson, Thomas Rochester Shepard.

Tom Shepard prepared for Yale at Williston Seminary in Easthampton, Massachusetts, and entered Yale in September, 1870, as a member of the Class of 1874. But at that period of his life, his temperament seems to have been inclined more toward adven-

ture than toward scholarship, and finding his studies distasteful he left Yale before completing even his freshman year, and went out to Wisconsin. There, he engaged in railroad engineering work on the Sheboygan & Fond du Lac Railroad, and later on the Galena & Southern Wisconsin Railroad. During one interval, in 1873-74, he was the Assistant Engineer in charge of the quadruple tracking of fourteen miles of the main line of the New York Central Railroad, from Bergen to Batavia, New York, this being at the time that the two-track main line was converted to four tracks.

But at the end of 1874, after about three years of railroad engineering experience, railroad building was at a low ebb and he decided to study law. Accordingly, about December 1, 1874, Tom Shepard entered the law office of his older brother, Charles Edward Shepard, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and began to study law in that office. He completed his studies and was admitted to the bar in Wisconsin on February 21, 1876. Throughout the rest of his life, his profession was the law rather than engineering, but his engineering experience stood him in good stead, particularly in later years when his law firm in Seattle represented the Great Northern Railway and he was able quickly to understand the railroad engineering terms and practices which arose from time to time in the legal work of representing the railway, and still later during his law practice in Alaska, when an understanding of surveying was most helpful to his legal work involving the boundaries of mining claims and the establishment of water rights and ditch lines for hydraulic mining.

A few days after his admission to the bar in Wisconsin, his brother Charles took Tom into partnership with him, organizing the firm of Shepard & Shepard, and they continued to practice law in Fond du Lac until 1881, when Tom Shepard moved to Milwaukee and entered a firm which then became Davis, Reiss & Shepard. Two years later his brother Charles moved down from Fond du Lac to join him at Milwaukee, and they again organized under the firm name of Shepard & Shepard. During this interval, the two brothers compiled a digest of the decisions of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which was published in 1884 as *Shepard's Wisconsin*

Digest and was a standard reference work on the laws of that state for many years.

Because of the onset of catarrhal deafness, doctors in Wisconsin advised Tom to seek a climate different from that of the Great Lakes region. Accordingly, he and his wife and young child emigrated to the milder climate of Puget Sound, in the state of Washington, and settled at Seattle, in March, 1889. Not long after his arrival there, Judge Thomas Burke, a prominent citizen and leading lawyer of Seattle, took him into partnership, the firm being known for a time as Burke, Shepard & Woods, and later as Burke, Shepard & McGilvra. It lasted until Judge Burke's retirement from active practice in 1903, and during that interval it was the leading law firm of this rapidly growing city.

In 1904, eastern clients prevailed upon Tom Shepard to go to Nome, Alaska, to look into a large mining property there, in which the clients contemplated investing. Another temporary visit to Nome in the summer of 1905 led to a removal to that city and the establishment of his law office there in 1906, where he continued practice for two or three years. After a short interval of resumption of his practice in Seattle, he moved to Valdez, Alaska in 1911, where he was quickly appointed United States Commissioner, which position, in Alaska, carried with it the ex officio positions of Probate Judge, Register of Wills, Recorder of Deeds, Justice of the Peace, and Coroner.

In 1913, the boom in Valdez seeming to be over, he moved back to Seattle, resumed his practice there, and was appointed to the faculty of the University of Washington Law School, where he taught mining law and the law of irrigation and water-rights, for about four years. But with America at war, he left Seattle and went to Washington, D. C., to see whether he could be of assistance in the nation's war effort. Franklin K. Lane, then Secretary of the Interior, appointed him an Assistant Attorney in the Interior Department, which position he held until his retirement about 1926. He died of the effects of arterio sclerosis, at Washington, D. C., on March 15, 1928, at the age of 75 years, 7 months, and 15 days. He was buried with his parents, grandparents, and first wife, in

the Shepard family plot at Greenmount Cemetery, in his native village of Dansville.

In addition to *Shepard's Wisconsin Digest*, of which he was co-author with his brother, Thomas Rochester Shepard was the author of a few articles and pamphlets on legal subjects and a number of poems, some published in various magazines and newspapers, which were collected and printed after his death in a book entitled *Sonnets of War and Peace, and Other Poems*, by Thomas Rochester Shepard, issued in 1929. He and his brother were also joint authors with their sister Mary Shepard (the principal author) of the book *Golden Lives, a Memoir of Charles and Katherine Rochester Shepard*, which was issued anonymously in 1905 as a memorial to their parents. It contains portraits and biographical sketches of both parents. Those who wish further information may consult pages 172-176 of the book *Dansville, 1789-1902, Historical, Biographical, Descriptive*, by A. O. Bunnell and F. I. Quick, published at Dansville in 1902.

Thomas Rochester Shepard was married twice, and had five children, all sons, three of whom died in infancy. Details of his marriages and his children are given on the genealogical chart *Pedigree of Shepard of Dansville, New York*, by Charles Shepard (the present author), published in 1921. His only son by his first marriage, Arthur MacCartney Shepard, is now living with his wife at Madison, Connecticut. They have no children. The second and only surviving child of the second marriage, Charles Shepard, is now living with his wife in the suburbs of the city of Rochester, New York. They have two children, a daughter Adele Elizabeth Shepard, born 1939, and an adopted son, David Garrison Shepard, born 1941. Further details as to these children and their mother are given on the genealogical chart *Lehmann of Neuchatel*, by Elizabeth Dwight Garrison Shepard and Charles Shepard, published in 1949.

In this year of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Rochester Shepard, his children and his grandchildren pause to revere his memory and to do him honor.

